

OpenDoors NEWSLETTER

Open Doors Southern Africa – 50 years of service to the persecuted Church

A close-up photograph of a middle-aged man with a mustache, smiling broadly with his eyes closed. He is wearing a light-colored, vertically striped button-down shirt. The background is a grocery store aisle with shelves stocked with various products, slightly out of focus.

**MAKING
HOPE
VISIBLE**
in the Middle East

September / October 2021

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Representative image used.

HOPE

AMID 10 YEARS OF WAR

It's been a decade since the civil war in Syria started. Over half a million people killed, over six million Syrian refugees spread over the world and over six million people displaced within Syria. That is the toll of ten years of war.

For children like Michel and married couple, Mousa and Nagham, the past 10-years have been challenging.



MEET MICHEL...

On 8 March 2011, a few weeks before the war broke out little Michel (now 10) was born. The wound from his mother's C-section hadn't healed yet when their family had to flee their village. After 10-days, they could return to their village, where they lived for three years before they had to flee again and now live in Latakia, Syria.

When we ask Michel about the things he misses most from that time, he runs out of the room to cry.

As he runs out, his mother says: "*Michel has so much pride; he is a reliable boy. I can count on him to go to the grocery store and buy bread from the bakery, even at ten years old... but always hides his feelings.*"

Michel re-enters and answers: "*I miss my bedroom, especially my bed; it was filled with toys, and I loved it.*"

Today, Michel has one wish: "*I wish for Syria every good thing in life. I wish it goes back to the way it was before I was born and hope that we have peace.*"



MEET MOUSA AND NAGHAM...

Mousa (then 38) and Nagham (then 35) were planning their wedding when unrest grew. They postponed it but eventually got married in June, amid the war, thinking life would return to normal soon. But it only got worse.

A few months later, Nagham became pregnant but sadly miscarried due to stress of the unrest. *"After that, we decided, we didn't want to have a baby before the end of the war..."* But after almost two years of no end in sight, they agreed to start their family.

Christa was born in 2014, and Fadi was born in 2019. Raising them amid a war hasn't been easy. *"There is no gas, no fuel, no electricity, not enough medication, not enough water, not even milk for the children; the situation of the schools is miserable,"* says Mousa with sadness in his eyes.

That is why your support right now is crucial for Christians in Syria. *"Your help makes us feel that we're not alone. We feel that there is hope for us,"* says Nagham and Mousa, who assist their church, which is one of the Centres of Hope.

Like so many other Christians in Syria, Mousa and Nagham are thankful for your support as the war continues. *"We've reached thousands of hungry people during the years, hundreds of sick and homeless people... Thank you for standing by us, supporting us and caring for Syrians as one Body of Christ."*

Middle Eastern youth transforming society

By Calah*, an Open Doors worker living in the Middle East and working among youth in the region.

Persecution robs adults of many things like security, homes, jobs, marriages, their children, and more. But for young people – it can stop them from ever attaining these things in the first place.

Many Christians in Iraq and Syria, live in a context that enforces a minority mindset upon them, keeps them silent and out of society. An effective way for those who want to hurt the Church in our region is to attack the youth. They can be attacked through their education, their families, cultural expectations and through the systems and structures that marginalise Christians from birth to death.

Those who want to hurt the Church don't want the Church to be a place where people grow in their faith, and support and serve one another and they certainly don't want her impacting society, so through different means, they tell the Christian youth that certain spaces and spheres in society are simply not for them.

But this hasn't stopped God from raising up young people who are bringing transformation in both the Church and society. We see youth pioneering their church's community work and becoming respected leaders in their communities, they visit the sick, pray for them, talk to them and study the Bible with them.

Other young people have organised sports and activities for kids of all faiths, others are tackling hot topics of faith and justice on social media and are encouraging other young people to think more deeply and grow in their faith. All this goes against the message that society is pushing at them – that they are to stay silent and out of society.

These young people are an affront to those who want to stop the Church from being a tool of transformation. Today, where can you bring positive transformation in spaces where people expect you to be silent? Where is there space for you to be a unique blessing to others? Where are you positioned to bring transformation?

**Name changed for security reasons.*

Helping families of missing Christians find hope

In 2014, Sana stared down the barrel of an Islamic State fighter's gun as she begged him to allow her husband and two sons to go with her. It's seven years later, and Sana has never seen them again. Up until this year, she has never shared with anyone about their kidnapping.

Sadly, stories about kidnappings of Christians by IS like Sana's have been kept silent for years out of shame and fear. Now, one by one, they're coming to the surface.

But why did the stories of IS Christian captives remain silent for so long?

"You know," says Father Ammar: "Our people don't like to speak about the pain that they have inside. They don't like to talk about what happened when they were with IS. Especially not when they were used like slaves, like some of the girls."

In a country that has no significant mental health care system to address the issues that the Christian community is faced with today, the stories of kidnappings emphasise the continuing need for Centres of Hope.



Sana is still waiting for her kidnapped husband and two sons to come back home.

With your support, we've been supporting churches like Father Ammar's to become Centres of Hope. Next to practical and spiritual support, the centres provide emotional support. We don't know if Sana will accept help, but there are many Christians like her who need our support. *"They need someone to be close to them, listen to their needs. Someone to help them to find hope for the future,"* says Father Ammar.

Healing from persecution takes time. That's why your continued help for the Iraqi Church to be a Centre of Hope amid ongoing turmoil is vital in letting our brothers and sisters know that they're not forgotten. So thank you for your ongoing prayers and support!

Your support helps spread the Word of God

The Bible is a treasure that persecuted Christians hold onto in their darkest hours. But for some, it's not easy getting hold of a Bible or Bible study books.

In places like Iraq, the Coronavirus pandemic has made Bible distributor Ramy's* work more difficult, but he gladly does it as people have started studying the Bible at home more because of the pandemic. They consider it to be the most important book. Some of these Christians share what the Bible means to them.

Twenty-one-year-old **Sedar's** eyes sparkle when she talks about God, His Church and

His Book: *"The Bible is the most important book in the world, it's the Book that teaches us most. It's fundamental for every human being."*

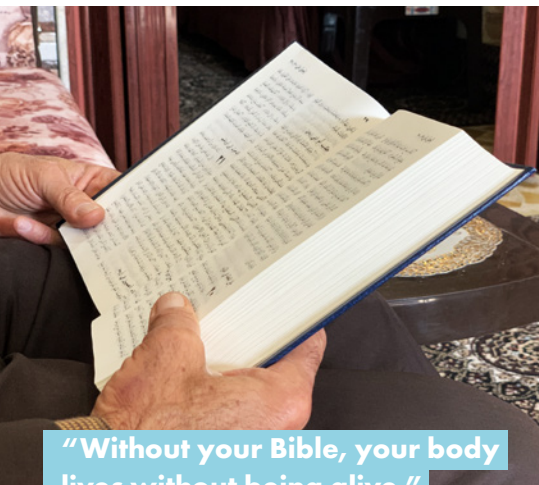
Jalila (75) may not be able to see as well as she used to, but this doesn't stop her from reading her Bible and reading it with her grandchildren daily. Her Bible was the only book she took when she had to flee from Islamic State. *"The Bible is the food of the soul. It's the most important thing in my life,"* she says.

With your support, her grandchildren have received a children's Bible and other books that help them understand their faith. **Aram** takes after his grandmother in sharing the Word of God: *"I share the stories I read with my friends in school,"* he says.

Sabah, who spent 10-years in an Iranian prison as a prisoner of war, has planted

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from a young age a love for the Bible in his son **Miron** (25). *"The Bible is the spirit of the body,"* says Miron. *"Without your Bible, your body lives without being alive."*

Thank you for supporting this vital part of our ministry over the years. It's a huge blessing to many persecuted Christians as the Word of God encourages them, strengthens them and reminds them that they're not alone in their hardships. As Jalila says: *"Through the Bible, I listen to His voice. I know the hand of my Saviour is with me."*

**Name changed for security reasons.*

MAKE HOPE VISIBLE

Millions of Christians face persecution and discrimination for their faith in Jesus. As persecution against them continues to increase, one thing they need more than ever before is hope for the future.

You can help make hope visible by becoming a bearer of hope. By becoming a monthly giver, your support can make hope tangible by meeting the most urgent needs of our persecuted brothers and sisters.

"When a hungry person gets a food package, it gives him hope. When someone can start a small business, that gives hope. When a mother of a female-headed household gets warm winter clothes for the children, it gives hope. And giving hope is contagious. When someone sees that a person is successful

in starting a small business, it gives hope to other people too. Someone who has hope, spreads hope," says Mourad*, the coordinator of our work in Syria.

Today, if you're able to make a commitment, please prayerfully consider becoming a monthly donor and help make hope come alive in the lives of our family in Christ.

Visit www.opendoors.org.za/be_hope or scan the QR to sign up for a monthly debit order.

Alternatively email us at southafrica@od.org or call us on 011 888 9341.



From the heart

Dear friend

Recently in my daily reading, I was both challenged and encouraged by reading Paul's second letter to the Corinthian Church where he commends them for their eagerness to help the poor in the Church in Jerusalem, and how reports of their enthusiasm stirred the Church in Macedonia to action even though they didn't have much to give.

In his letter, Paul compares giving to sowing seeds and the wonderful promise that as they give generously with cheerful hearts, God is able to not only meet their own needs but increase their store of seed too so that they can continue to be generous on every occasion, and their generosity will, in turn, lead to thanksgiving to God.

That is challenging because our own circumstances of uncertainty in a global pandemic could cause us to hesitate in our generosity to the Church in need elsewhere in the world. But it's encouraging to be reminded that we can't outgive God's generosity.

As you can see from this newsletter, thanksgiving goes out to God from the Church in the Middle East for your gifts and prayers that have helped Christians in dire need. With them, I thank God for His provision through your generosity.

Support to meet the ongoing needs for basic necessities and leadership training in the churches in Syria, Iraq and beyond is essential. It's an occasion to be generous. So please consider signing up as a regular giver to serve the persecuted Church living courageously in insecure circumstances.

Your generous gifts will lead to thanksgiving to God and, in His grace, stir others to action.

Peace

Lynette Leibach

Executive Director

Open Doors Southern Africa



Persecuted  But never alone.



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